

## Hopkins Should Win, But So Will De La Hoya

Written by Steve Kim

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This Saturday night Oscar De La Hoya faces his greatest challenge when he takes on the undisputed middleweight champion of the world, Bernard Hopkins. The prevailing thought is the De La Hoya, who was extremely fortunate to even be in this position after struggling mightily with Felix Sturm in June, will be the next execution victim of Hopkins, who has seemingly ruled the middleweight division forever.

But it says here that De La Hoya, who began his career as a 130-pounder, will actually be competitive against the aforementioned 'Executioner.' Yeah, his head may be on the chopping block, but De La Hoya and his reputation will come out intact—if not enhanced.

No, I'm not calling for the upset, but I do think that De La Hoya will fight well early, using his speed, quickness and fear (yes, I said fear, having a healthy dose of it can do wonders for a fighter) will propel Oscar to box effectively in the early rounds and then he'll do his customary second-half fade to lose a respectable decision.

On the surface you do wonder how a guy that got a gift decision against Sturm—who wasn't exactly mistaken for Carlos Monzon coming in—will possibly be in the same class as Hopkins. I mean not only is Hopkins considered an all-time great middleweight, but he's also considered no worse than the second best fighter on the planet pound-for-pound currently.

But here's the rub, do you really think a fighter like De La Hoya, who's had so many prime time events like he's had, could possibly prepare for Sturm like he would for a Hopkins? Of course not, human nature, or Oscar's nature, simply wouldn't allow it. A fighter of his stature probably brushed off his fight against the German as a dress rehearsal for the real fight in September. In the aftermath of his gross miscalculation, a fighter of his pride and ego just had to be stung by the criticism he received after his last bout. Pride and ego are delicate tools of big name fighters. If often times drives them to do unthinkable things and allows them to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds.

On the flip side it can lead fighters to make unwise choices. Eventually most marquee fighters will both benefit and be hurt by the very same thing that pushes them. Just ask Sugar Ray Leonard. It was his own hubris that allowed him to even think about defeating Marvin Hagler and then eventually doing it. But it was these very same traits that had him in the ring against Terry Norris and later, Hector Camacho, in ill-advised (to say the least) fights.

But Oscar is at a different time and place than Leonard, whose career was a series of high profile, stops and starts. De La Hoya, outside of his hiatus from the ring in 2000, has been a fairly consistent performer in the ring. And even in his losses, he has always been in the fight. This bodes well for him.

Oscar has been there and done that, the moment will not overcome him. But for the first time, there is no pressure on him to win. Quick, name me the last time that Oscar was listed as a

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betting underdog?

C'mon, when?

Still have no answer?

Of course you don't, because there isn't one. The Hopkins bout represents the one and only time he comes in not expected to win—a testament to the adroit handling of his career by Bob Arum and his own ability.

And this could actually benefit De La Hoya. Lose, and nobody is surprised by the result. But win, and all of a sudden, even his staunchest critics have to now reevaluate his career.

But if he should lose in a close, hard fought fight, for De La Hoya, while it may be a loss on his record, it's a win for his legacy.